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ABSTRACT

This bulletin provides information on two educational disadvantages of language-minority persons in the United States based on an analysis of data from the nationwide Survey of Income and Education (SIE), conducted in the spring of 1976 by the Bureau of the Census. Language-minority persons were found to be educationally disadvantaged on two key measures: school grade attainment for age and drop-out rate. SIE findings for persons of Hispanic origin who usually speak Spanish show that on these measures, this group is even more disadvantaged than language-minority persons in the aggregate. In addition to summaries of some of the findings, data are presented on the percentages of students two or more years behind expected age-grade levels by ethnic origin and language characteristics and on the numbers and percentages of students age 6 to 20 in grades 1 to 12 who were below expected grade levels. Additionally, numbers and percentages of persons 14 to 25 years old who had not completed four years of high school and were not currently enrolled are also presented. Information is also presented on related reports. (SW)

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National Center for Education Statistics

BULLETIN

78 B-4

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE : Education Division

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Contact: Leslie J. Silverman
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THE EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE OF LANGUAGE-MINORITY PERSONS* IN THE UNITED STATES, SPRING 1976

ED166975

Young language-minority persons who usually speak languages other than English have been found to be educationally disadvantaged on two key measures--school grade attainment for age, and drop-out rate, according to Marie D. Eldridge, Administrator of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This conclusion comes from an analysis of data from the nationwide Survey of Income and Education (SIE) conducted in the spring of 1976. Additionally, SIE findings for persons of Hispanic origin who usually speak Spanish show that on these measures, this group is even more disadvantaged than language-minority persons in the aggregate. (See charts on page 2.) Mrs. Eldridge cautions, however, that these findings should not be interpreted to mean that predominant use of a language other than English is the cause of educational disadvantage. Causes will need to be determined by further analysis and research.

Further information on the SIE findings follow:

PROGRESS IN SCHOOL

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- Persons with language-minority backgrounds enrolled in grades 5-12, and who usually speak their native languages, were more than three times as likely to be two or more grades below the grade levels expected for their ages as those with English language backgrounds.

- Persons with Spanish-language backgrounds enrolled in grades 5-12 were about twice as likely to be two or more grades below the grade levels expected for their ages as were those with English-language backgrounds.

- The age-grade attainments of persons with language-minority backgrounds who usually speak English exceeded, on the average, those of persons who usually speak their native languages. The percents of those who were two or more grades below expected levels and were enrolled in grades 9-12 (where the differences are greatest) are: 9 percent for persons with English-language backgrounds,

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* Persons of any age whose usual or second household language is not English, or, if over 14 years of age, whose mother tongue is other than English, whether or not they usually speak English. (See Page 7 for definitions).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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CHART 1.—Percentages of students 2 or more years behind expected age-grade levels by ethnic origin and language characteristics: Spring 1976

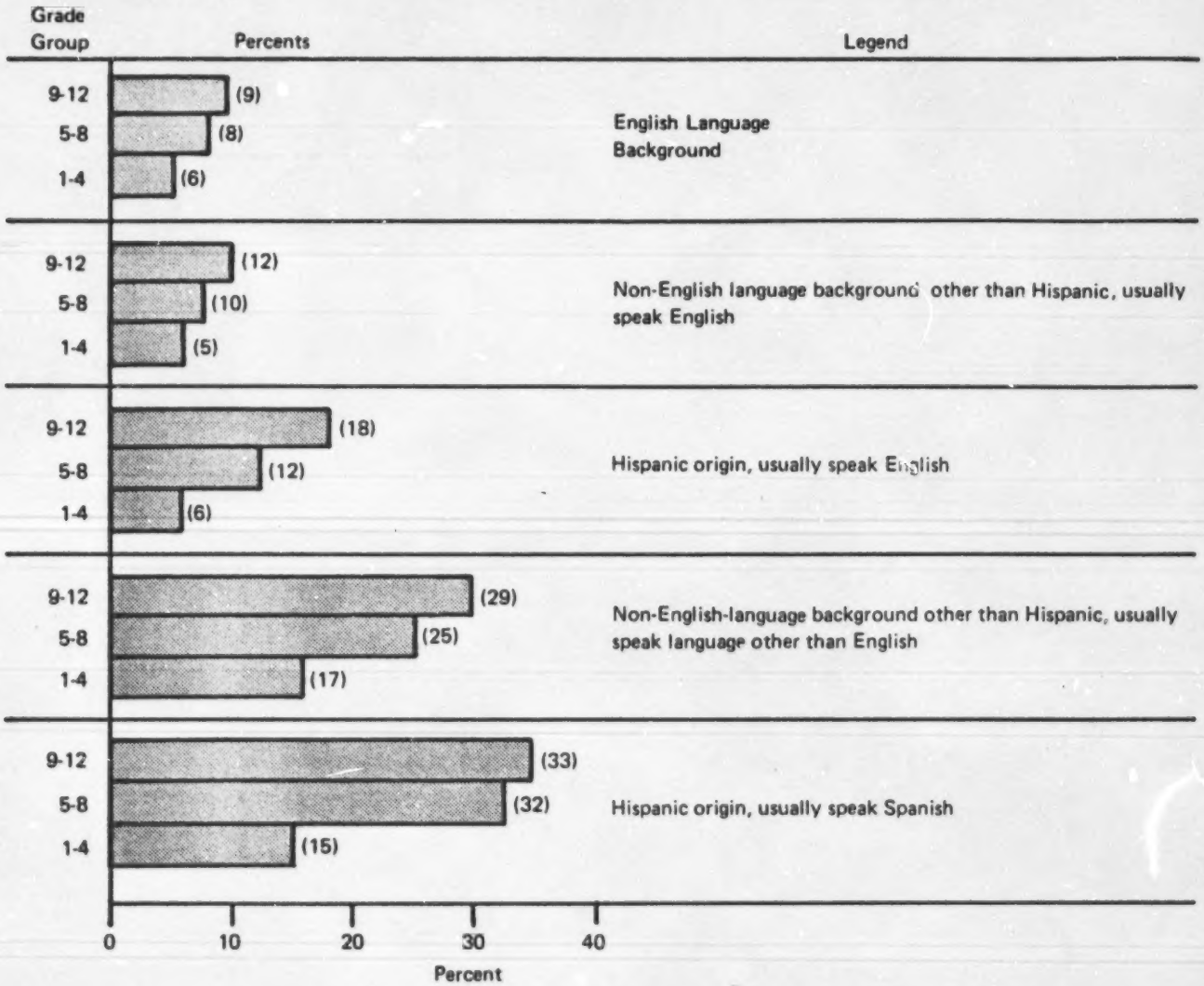
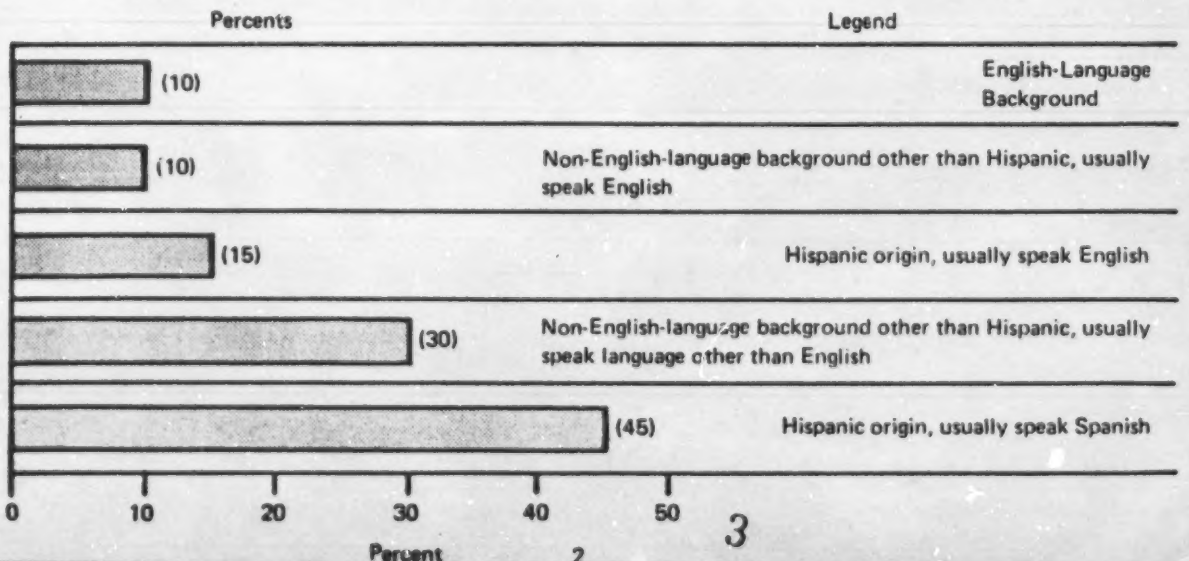


CHART 2.—Percentages of 14-25 year olds who have dropped out of school, by ethnic group and language characteristics: Spring 1976



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15 percent for persons with language-minority backgrounds who usually speak English, and 32 percent for persons with language-minority backgrounds who usually speak their native languages.

- Data shown in table 2 suggest that significant numbers of students are not being promoted to the next grade automatically. Some 8 percent of the total school age population was two or more years behind expected grade level, and this measure increased from the early grades through senior high school for each of the groups studied.

DROPPING OUT

- While 10 percent of persons (age 14 to 25) with English-language backgrounds were high school dropouts, 40 percent of those in this age group with language-minority backgrounds, and who usually speak their native languages, were high school dropouts.

- Hispanics who usually speak Spanish dropped out at a higher rate (45 percent) than persons in the aggregate of other language minorities who usually speak their native languages (30 percent).

- Compared with that of persons with English-language backgrounds, the drop-out rate was 4.5 times as high for Hispanics who usually speak Spanish and 3 times as high for those of other language backgrounds who usually speak their native languages.

- The dropout rate for persons with non-English-language backgrounds who usually speak English (12 percent) was close to the rate for those with English-language backgrounds (10 percent), but differed substantially from the rate for those who usually speak their native languages (40 percent).

LIMITATION OF THE DATA

The user is cautioned against drawing causal inferences from these descriptive findings. In particular, these data are not intended to prove in any sense that the use of the non-English language is the main cause of relatively low academic progress or dropping out from school. Also, these data do not imply that the use of English by language-minority persons "causes" them to progress through school at nearly the same rate as native English-speaking children do.

NCES is investigating several different approaches toward further analysis of the interrelationships between language background, language usage, and school progress, including:

- Further analysis of the SIE to determine if the findings in this Bulletin are consistent or vary among the different Hispanic groups; e.g., Cubans, Puerto Ricans, etc.

- Further analysis of the SIE to determine the effect of socioeconomic variables; e.g., income level.

- Longitudinal surveys that will provide data on the progress over time of specific persons with different language backgrounds and language use.

SOURCE OF DATA

The Survey of Income and Education (SIE) was conducted by the Bureau of the Census in spring 1976. The SIE questions on language background and current usage were developed by NCES, which provided partial financial support to augment the SIE sample and to add the language questions.

The survey sample consisted of 51 independent State samples that totaled about 160,000 occupied households. Personal interviews were completed in nearly 95 percent of these households. For methodological details about the SIE, see such reports as "Assessment of the Accuracy of the Survey of Income and Education," report to Congress as mandated by the Education Amendments of 1974, submitted by the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, dated January, 1978.

RELATED REPORTS

The SIE provides, for the first time in U.S. history, State estimates of current language usage as well as language backgrounds. In part, the SIE helps to satisfy a congressional mandate to NCES (P.L. 93-380, section 105) to report the number of school-age children and adults with non-English-language backgrounds who have limited English-speaking ability. Two companion bulletins are currently in preparation. One will provide State-level detail on the numbers of persons with non-English-language backgrounds; the other will provide national estimates on place of birth and language characteristics of persons of Hispanic origin. A future report to the Congress, as called for in P.L. 93-380, will provide an estimate of the number of persons with non-English-language backgrounds who have limited English-speaking ability. Other future reports based on SIE data will focus on blacks, the disadvantaged, and other groups of special concern.

Information about NCES work in the subject of this Bulletin may be obtained from Mr. Leslie J. Silverman at (202) 245-3397.

TABLE 1.--Numbers and percentages of persons 14 to 25 years old who had not completed 4 years of high school and were not currently enrolled[1/], by total, ethnic origin, and language characteristics: Spring 1976
(Numbers in thousands)

Ethnic origin of population, 14 to 25 years old	Total	English-language background	Non-English-language background			
			Total	Usual individual language		
				English	Non-English	Not reported
Total	47,311[2/]	42,541	4,618	2,868	1,049	701
Dropouts	5,013	4,145	844	347	423	75
Percentage	(11)	(10)	(18)	(12)	(40)	(11)
Persons of other than Hispanic origin	44,700	42,141	2,411	1,527	330	566
Dropouts	4,394	4,082	290	147	98	45
Percentage	(10)	(10)	(12)	(10)	(30)	(8)
Persons of Hispanic origin	2,611	400	2,208	1,342	721	145
Dropouts	618	62	554	200	324	30
Percentage	(24)	(16)	(25)	(15)	(45)	(20)

1/ Not enrolled at any time from February-May 1976

2/ Includes an estimated 151,000 persons whose language background is unknown. An estimated 3,000 among the 151,000 persons are of Hispanic origin; 23,000 are dropouts.

NOTE.--Details may not add to total shown because of rounding.

SOURCE.--Survey of Income and Education, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, spring 1976, preliminary data. The questions on language were developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, which provided partial support for the SIE.

TABLE 2.--Numbers and percentages of students age 6 to 20 in grades 1 to 12 who were below expected grade levels[1/] by totals, ethnic origin, and language characteristics: Spring 1976
(Numbers in thousands)

Ethnic origin and grade level of students aged 6-20 enrolled in grades 1-12	Total	English language background	Non-English language background			
			Total	Usual individual language		
				English	Non-English	Not reported
All Groups						
TOTAL	45,216[2/]	40,617	4,469	3,073	799	597
Below expected grade	3,713[2/]	3,146	555	317	192	46
Percent	(8)	(8)	(12)	(10)	(24)	(8)
In Grades 1-4	13,978	12,431	1,516	1,022	330	164
Below expected grade	809	689	117	58	50	9
Percent	(6)	(6)	(8)	(6)	(15)	(6)
In Grades 5-8	16,028	14,363	1,614	1,113	286	215
Below expected grade	1,417	1,193	220	121	84	15
Percent	(9)	(8)	(14)	(11)	(30)	(7)
In Grades 9-12	15,210	13,823	1,340	939	183	218
Below expected grade	1,487	1,263	217	139	58	21
Percent	(10)	(9)	(16)	(15)	(32)	(10)
Students of Hispanic origin						
TOTAL	3,050	548	2,493	1,748	563	182
Below expected grade	396	36	357	199	138	20
Percent	(13)	(7)	(14)	(11)	(25)	(11)
In Grades 1-4	1,104	225	876	568	246	63
Below expected grade	88	13	75	34	36	4
Percent	(8)	(6)	(9)	(6)	(15)	(7)
In Grades 5-8	1,171	202	965	700	191	74
Below expected grade	158	8	151	81	61	10
Percent	(14)	(4)	(16)	(12)	(32)	(13)
In Grades 9-12	774	122	652	480	126	45
Below expected grade	148	16	132	84	41	6
Percent	(19)	(13)	(20)	(18)	(33)	(14)
Students of other than Hispanic origin						
TOTAL	42,167	40,069	1,976	1,326	236	415
Below expected grade	3,319	3,110	197	118	54	25
Percent	(8)	(8)	(10)	(9)	(23)	(6)
In Grades 1-4	12,874	12,206	639	454	84	101
Below expected grade	721	676	42	23	14	5
Percent	(6)	(6)	(7)	(5)	(17)	(5)
In Grades 5-8	14,856	14,161	649	413	95	141
Below expected grade	1,259	1,186	70	40	24	6
Percent	(8)	(8)	(11)	(10)	(25)	(4)
In Grades 9-12	14,436	13,702	688	459	57	173
Below expected grade	1,339	1,248	85	54	16	15
Percent	(9)	(9)	(12)	(12)	(29)	(9)

1/ Eight years old or older in the first grade, 9 years old or older in the second grade, etc.

2/ Includes an estimated 130,000 students whose language background is unknown. An estimated 8,000 among the 130,000 students are of Hispanic origin and 12,000 are overage for their grade levels.

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding.

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Education conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Spring 1976, preliminary data. The questions on language were developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, which provided partial support for the SIE.

TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

Non-English-language backgrounds:

Persons 14 years and over who have:

A non-English mother tongue or a non-English language as their usual or second current household language;

Children below 14 years of age who have:

A non-English language as their usual or second household language

Dropout: Persons 14 to 25 years of age, not a high school graduate, and not enrolled in any school from February to May 1976.

Expected age for grade level: Seven years old or younger and in first grade, eight years old or younger and in second grade, etc.

Hispanic or Hispanic Origin: Persons of Hispanic origin in this report were determined on the basis of a question that asked for self-identification of the person's origin or descent. Respondents were asked to select their origin (or the origin of some other household member) from a "flash card" listing ethnic origins. Persons of Hispanic origin, in particular, were those who indicated that their origin was Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other Hispanic origin.

SURVEY OF INCOME AND EDUCATION
APPROXIMATE[1]/ STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATED PERCENTAGES

Base of percentage	Estimated percentage				
	5 or 95	10 or 90	15 or 85	25 or 75	50
15,000	12.9	17.7	21.0	25.5	29.4
25,000	9.9	13.7	16.1	19.8	22.8
50,000	7.1	9.8	11.6	14.0	16.2
75,000	5.7	8.0	9.5	11.4	13.2
100,000	5.0	6.9	8.1	9.9	11.4
150,000	4.1	5.6	6.6	8.1	9.3
250,000	3.2	4.4	5.1	6.3	7.2
500,000	2.3	3.0	3.6	4.4	5.1
750,000	1.8	2.6	3.0	3.6	4.2
1,000,000	1.5	2.1	2.6	3.2	3.6
1,500,000	1.4	1.8	2.1	2.6	3.0
2,500,000	1.1	1.4	1.7	2.0	2.3
5,000,000	.8	.9	1.2	1.4	1.7
7,500,000	.6	.8	.9	1.2	1.4
1,000,000	.5	.8	.8	1.1	1.2
15,000,000	.5	.6	.6	.8	.9
25,000,000	.3	.5	.5	.6	.8
50,000,000	.2	.3	.3	.5	.5

1/ The standard errors given above, provided by the Census Bureau, are based on some distributions from the 1970 Census and on some factors derived from other sources, not on direct calculations from the sample data. When direct calculations are made, it is likely that most of the standard error estimates will be somewhat lower.